

The Reality Of **SUFISM**

In The Light Of Quran and Sunnah



Compiled by:
Syed Tariq Ali

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Introduction

The word Sufi is derived from the Arabic word 'suf' which means 'wool' and which refers to the coarse woollen robes that were worn by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and by his close companions. The goal of a Sufi is none other than ALLAH Himself. There are signs of ALLAH everywhere in the universe and in man himself.

The origin and essence of man

Man is the mystery of

ALLAH for a mysterious purpose, man was outwardly created of clay and ALLAH breathed life into him, and all of the angels were commanded to prostrate themselves before him. As the Qur'an, which we believe is the highest form of revelation, declares:

"And remember when thy Lord said unto the angels: Lo I am creating a mortal out of potter's clay. So when I have made him and shaped him and have breathed into him of My Spirit, do ye fall down prostrating yourself unto him."

It is this Divine Spirit which is the essence of man. The body is merely the outward physical form which contains the Divine spark.

The body is made of the material elements fire, earth, air and water, and has five external senses -- sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch; and five internal faculties -- discursive thinking, imagination, doubting, memory and longing. All these powers, that is, both the external senses and the internal faculties, serve the heart. By the 'heart' we do not mean the physical organ which pumps the blood, and which is possessed by both man and animals. Rather by 'heart' we mean the Divine spark which distinguishes man from the animals. And unlike the physical heart which dies and decomposes with the rest of the physical body, the Divine spark or heart is indivisible and transcends death because its origin is in the spiritual world.

Man: the microcosm

The position of man in the universe is most

important. Man is the microcosm, that is, a miniature universe. As such, he comprises in his outward or physical aspect all the elements found in the universe. In his inner aspect, he contains the potential qualities of all creation from the lowest to the highest, that is, animal, satanic and angelic. He shares the qualities of lust and selfishness with the pigs; the qualities of jealousy and anger with the dogs; his cunning and deceit with Satan; his power and his spiritual light with the angels. But, what is more important, through love and devotion to

ALLAH (God) he can rise even higher than the angels, for he is the mystery of ALLAH before whom the angels were commanded to fall in prostration. He was given command over the whole universe.

The Qur'an declares: "It is ALLAH who created the heavens and the earth and sent down out of heaven water, wherewith He brought forth fruits to be your sustenance, and He subjected to you the ships to run upon the sea at His commandment, and He subjected to you the rivers, and He subjected to you the sun and moon constant upon their courses, and He subjected to you the night and the day and gave you all you asked Him." But although the universe was created for the service of man, man was created for the service of ALLAH and for that purpose alone. To the extent that he deviates from that purpose, he becomes unworthy of Divine guidance and favour. Consequently, he is left to his own devices with all his enormous powers, which, under the influence of his animal and satanic qualities, are capable of dragging him to the lowest of the low.

Purpose of life

Sufism helps man to be increasingly aware of his purpose

of life -- namely, unfailing service to his Lord and Creator. It is a path travelled under the guidance of a Sufi master, who is able to deliver man from the narrow confines of the material world into the limitless reality of a spiritual life, wherein he can experience the Divine spark which eternally shines within him.

It is most important to understand that material man acquires his knowledge generally through the five external senses and five inner faculties of which we spoke earlier. The spiritual man, on the other hand, has, in addition to these, a number of other means of acquiring knowledge, such as prophetic dreams and inspirations from beyond the material world. To the extent that a man adheres to the truth in his waking state, his dreams too disclose a similar degree of certainty.

The Prophet (pbuh) expressed this in the saying: "**The more truthful a man, the more prophetic his dreams.**"

Although knowledge through dreams comes in a state of sleep, insights through inspirations are gained in a state of wakefulness. The shaykh, or the Sufi teacher, interprets the dreams of a disciple, helps him to understand his inspirations, and resolves his doubts and uncertainties.

The spiritual mentor (shaykh)

The disciple's need to have a

shaykh is inevitable. If a man does not have a shaykh, Satan becomes his shaykh and lures him back into the temptation of his ego and finally destroys him in confusion and error. A disciple keeps unwavering faith in the words of his shaykh and receives infinite love and care from him. The relationship is strictly based on the pattern of the Holy Prophet's (pbuh) relations with his companions which enjoyed Divine support.

To quote the Qur'an:

"Now there has come to you a messenger from among yourselves. Grievous to him is your suffering, anxious is he over you, gentle to the believers, compassionate."

The Qur'anic roots of Sufism

Sufism really has its roots in

the Qur'an itself and in the religious experience of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The preliminary signs of revelation were given to the Prophet (pbuh) in the form of visions and the Prophet (pbuh) deliberately sought solitude until the book of his heart, which was pure and unspoiled by schoolmen, was opened and the Divine Pen engraved upon it the revelation, the Qur'an.

The Sufi's knowledge of ALLAH comes from the Qur'an directly. And in spite of the Sufi's proximity to ALLAH the undisputed basis of their direct experience of ALLAH has always been the Qur'an. The Qur'an contains instructions suitable to man with varying levels of spirituality. It satisfies those who are content with merely exoteric practices, but also contains the deepest and most profound esoteric meaning for those who desire a closer, more mystical relationship with ALLAH.

The Qur'anic verses which are the favourite of the Sufis include: "We ALLAH are closer to him [man] than his jugular vein."

"Say, surely we belong to ALLAH and to Him do we return."

"He is the First and the Last and the Manifest and the Hidden."

"ALLAH is the light of the heavens and the earth."

Such verses are limitless in their depth, scope and meaning, and man may draw from them as much mystical meaning as he has the capacity to understand.

ALLAH says in the Qur'an that: ALLAH sent His the Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) first and foremost as a Mercy unto all peoples. And men of different levels of spiritual understanding may avail themselves of this Mercy according to their various capacities.

The Prophet (pbuh) and his close associates never stopped at merely observing the minimum requirement in regard to prayer and devotional practices. All through his life, the Prophet (pbuh) kept long night vigils and practised voluntary fasts during most days. He never ate barley bread (the staple food of his day) on three consecutive days, and he never even touched a loaf of wheat bread -- which was a luxury. One of his favourite sayings was "Poverty is my pride," and this saying came to be quoted in every manual of Sufi doctrine, making the rule of poverty a basic characteristic of Sufi life.

Significance of remembrance

The Sufis live with an ever

increasing awareness of ALLAH. One aspect of this awareness is the practice of zikr. Zikr means 'remembering ALLAH usually by pronouncing His name or by uttering a number of recognized formulae. The Qur'an repeatedly admonishes believers to celebrate the praises of God and to do this often. For remembering the name of ALLAH brings satisfaction and comfort to man's heart. The following verse of the Qur'an reveals the significance of zikr:

"Recite that which has been revealed to you of the scripture, and observe prayer. For

prayer restrains one from lewdness and iniquity, but remembrance of ALLAH is the greatest virtue."

In one passage of the Qur'an, the importance of zikr is enhanced to such an extent that a response to it from ALLAH Himself is assured:

"Therefore remember Me, and I will remember you."

The Qur'an warns those who neglect zikr: "Whoso blinds himself to the remembrance of the All Merciful, to him we assign Satan for a comrade and debar them from the way, and yet they think they are guided." Again, "Be not as those who forgot ALLAH and so He caused them to forget their own souls. Those, they are ungodly". The key to human happiness lies in the remembrance of ALLAH as in the Qur'anic verse: "Verily, in the remembrance of ALLAH do hearts find peace."

Some orientalists who considered themselves experts on Islam invented the myth that the history of Sufism began with the appearance of certain introductory treatises on the Sufi tradition in the ninth and tenth centuries. In their assessment of the Sufi writings, they failed to give due consideration to the esoteric aspect of the Qur'an and the enormous literature on the sayings and deeds of the Holy Prophet (pbuh), which has inspired the Sufis of all generations.

The history and methodology of Sufism

Sufism is

an esoteric doctrine transmitted by word of mouth, and sometimes without even a spoken or written word, by an authorized teacher to a disciple, and from disciple to another disciple, in confidence. These secret instructions are acted upon by a disciple with perfect faith in the teacher. The disciple gives a report of his condition and experience in confidence to his teacher and receives another set of instructions most suitable to his state.

It is only the writings of the Sufi teachers, who speak from within the tradition, that allow an outsider a glimpse of the inner beauty of Sufism. One of the greatest scholars of all times was al-Ghazali. He lived in the later eleventh and early twelfth centuries. He wrote his famous work 'The Revival of the Sciences of Religion' in Arabic, with an abridged form, 'The Alchemy of Happiness', in Persian. These works were followed by the other writings and poetry by such Sufi teachers as Abdul-Karim al-Jili, Ibn Arabi, Suhrawardi, the famous Chishti saints, Hafiz, Sadi, Rumi and so many other Sufi poets.

At the same time there was an immense upsurge of open Sufi activity under the auspices of different Sufi orders in all parts of the Islamic world. Each Sufi order constituted a focal point of activity, from which Sufi teachings were carried to the mass of the population by the representatives of the head of the order. The Sufi organizations constituted the social cement of the society in which they lived. Because of the strength of this social cement, Islamic civilization was able not only to withstand the many political upheavals of this period, but it also acted as a civilizing influence on the powers that were responsible for these upheavals.

Suluk: the spiritual journey this brings us to say something about the Sufi discipline. The first and foremost requirement is the purification of the soul. The process is generally a long and difficult one. It consists of the three stages.

1. The carnal soul:

In the first stage, one struggles against the carnal soul or nafs al-ammara as it is called by the Sufis. Nafs al-ammara is the tendency in man to disobey God, and to take pleasure in evil deed and thought. This inclines man towards gossip, backbiting, vain talk, pride, selfishness, lust, hatred and jealousy. The struggle to overcome nafs al-ammara involves the purifying of the body, tongue, mind and heart.

- a) The body is purified by keeping it free from dirt, by preserving its members from harm and by not indulging in sexual license.
- b) The tongue must be purified by restraining it from backbiting, malicious gossip and vain talk, or from using it to alter the truth.
- c) The mind must be purified by abstaining from suspicion, plotting and thinking ill of others.
- d) The heart must be purified by keeping it free from lust, jealousy, greed, selfishness, hatred and pride.
- e) In this stage, a Sufi constantly examines the motives of his likes and dislikes.

2. The reproaching soul:

When he has subjugated the carnal soul, nafs al-ammara, the Sufi enters upon the second stage of purification in which he is able to respond readily to the call of the reproaching soul which is called nafs al-lawwama. It is the nafs al-lawwama which reproaches man for his evil deeds and impels him to acts of mercy and generosity.

3. The contented soul:

After this stage has become firmly established in him, the Sufi enters the third stage which is known as the station of the contented soul, nafs al-mutma'inna. In this stage, the Sufi develops to the fullest the tendency to obey Allah and to act in perfect harmony with His commandments. Here the soul is reconciled with all other stations of the path, such as poverty, patience, gratitude and trust in Allah. Here the soul finds perfect satisfaction in being governed by the heart, the Divine spark in man. Here the Sufi becomes truly free from fear and grief. As Allah said in the Qur'an, "Lo, indeed, the friends of Allah have no fear, nor are they grieved." Fear and grief are qualities of man, and friends of Allah are relieved of the burden of these qualities. Fearlessly, and with the strength of faith, they invite man to Allah, the source of man's creation and the goal of his life.

Here lies the difference between a true teacher and a false one -- the true teacher invites man to ALLAH and the pretender invites man to himself.

In this stage, a Sufi is filled with love, mercy, kindness, and a burning zeal to help others. In order to reach this high station, a Sufi must constantly strive to control his ego, to curb his anger and impatience. He must eat less, sleep less, talk less, and deny himself the pleasure of other people's company. Sometimes he withdraws completely from the worldly activities and occupies himself entirely with the remembrance of ALLAH and meditation.

As he makes progress spiritually, he is able to extend the length of his periods of seclusion, culminating in retreats of forty days' duration. In this seclusion, the Sufi fasts during the day, breaking his fast after sunset with only a small piece of bread and some water. During the nights, he keeps constant vigil and chants a selected verse from the Qur'an 125,000 times. The verse usually chanted is: "There is no ALLAH but Thou, the Holy Lord. I am indeed one of the evil doers." Or, "Say, He, Allah is One. Allah is Sufficient unto Himself."

Meditation, ecstasy, states, stations and ascension

The various stages on the mystical path are known as maqamat, or the 'stations', which can be reached by any Sufi by means of prayer, fasting, meditation, and the hal or 'mystical state', which may be vouchsafed to the Sufi by the Grace of ALLAH but is not attainable by the mystic's own efforts. A Sufi may be blessed by an experience which reveals to his soul the reality of the whole universe, from the lowest layer of earth to the highest heaven. This experience is called mi' raj or the 'ascension.' In this, a Sufi is generally accompanied by the spirit of his shaykh, and comes in contact with the spirits of other shaykhs and prophets. Various stations are also revealed to him with different colours and lights.

Extinction (fana) and subsistence (baqa): One of the important phases of mystical experience which is attained by the Grace of ALLAH by a traveller on the mystical path is the state of fana fi Allah, 'extinction of the self in ALLAH' which is the transition to the state of baqa billah or the 'eternal life in union with God'. By passing away from self, the individual does not cease to exist, but is permitted to enjoy the supreme mystical experience in union with Allah. He is fully absorbed into the Love of ALLAH which gives him an everlasting awareness of the all-pervading presence of ALLAH.

This doctrine is further explained in an authentic tradition of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) which states that ALLAH said:

"Nothing is more pleasing to Me as a means for My slave to draw near unto Me than the worship I have made binding upon him. And My slave does not cease to draw near unto Me with added devotions of his free will until I Love him. And when I Love him, I am the Hearing wherewith he hears, and the Sight wherewith he sees, and the Hand wherewith he smites, and the Foot whereon he walks".

Most Sufis who have gone through this experience have preferred to live eternally in the greatest depth of silence which transcends all forms and sounds. Yet a few others have produced works of unsurpassed glory, especially in the fields of literature and music, which have crowned the culture of the entire Islamic world. Their works have inspired Sufis and non-Sufis for generations. As the great Persian Sufi poet, Hafiz of Shiraz, who is fondly remembered as the 'tongue of the unseen', said centuries ago for all times: "He whose heart is alive with love, never dies."

The Pseudo-Sufis

Over the centuries, as the Sufi orders grew, the Sufi masters were generally recognized as sages and men of wisdom and grace, enjoying the esteem of the general populace. The growing social prestige of the Sufis attracted self-seekers who posed as Sufis and dervishes and embarked upon exploiting the goodwill of the people. These pretenders indulged in superstitious practices, neglected moral order and religious ordinances, and boasted of their ignorance and lack of learning. In order to cover their own lack of discipline and dedication to the goal, some of these charlatans even tried to cut Sufism from its very roots--namely, the Qur'an and the practice of the Holy Prophet (pbuh).

The acts of these pseudo-Sufis never altered the true course of Sufism. The heart of Sufism remained pure, well-guarded by the traditional practice of the initiation of a seeker into a Sufi order by a Sufi master. The master's authority had properly been passed upon him by a previous master through the investiture of the traditional mantle of authority, symbolized by the presentation of a patched cloth. This initiation is supported by the tree of lineage going back through all the previous masters to the Prophet (pbuh) from whom the authority to instruct in the esoteric doctrine originated. Even today, this is the general practice of all the recognized Sufi orders.

It is Sufi masters such as al-Junayd, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Shaykh Abdul-Karim al-Jili, Khawaja Moinuddin Chishti and Jalal Uddin Rumi, among many others, who devoted their lives to spreading the light and grace among all men, irrespective of man's geographical, social, religious and racial origin. They left for all men a rich tradition of love and peace for all

What Is Tasawwuf

Tasawwuf is a branch of Islamic knowledge

which focuses on the spiritual development of the Muslim. Allah sent His final messenger, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), as a source of knowledge for the entire Ummah. He was the fountain of Quran, Hadith, tafsir, rhetoric, fiqh, and so on. After the Prophet, the scholars of this ummah carried and propagated each of these branches of knowledge. Because no one can attain the perfection of the Prophet, who single handedly assumed all of these roles, various branches of the Islamic sciences developed. For example, Imam Abu Hanifah preserved the science of fiqh and after him thousands of scholars continued in his footsteps. Hence these scholars preserved the fiqh of the Prophet. Similarly Imam Bukhari and the other famous scholars of Hadith, preserved the words of the Prophet. The scholars of tajweed preserved the recitation of the Prophet. And, the scholars of Arabic grammar preserved the language of the Prophet.

Along these lines, the Prophet was the model of spirituality for the world. His God-consciousness, deep spirituality, acts of worship, and love for Allah were preserved and propagated by an Islamic science called Tasawwuf. The aim of the scholars of this science was purification of the heart, and development of consciousness of Allah through submission to the Sharia and Sunnah.

How is Tasawwuf Related to Sufism?

Studying the life of the Prophet, the scholars who propagated the science of tasawwuf understood that a requisite for approaching Allah was abandonment of the common pursuits of the world. They often wore wool because of its simplicity and low cost. In Arabic the word for wool is *suf* and thus, those who wore it became known as the Sufis. Another possible derivation of the word comes from the root word *safa*, which means "to clean." Because the scholars of tasawwuf focused on cleansing the heart, they later became known as the Sufis.

Who is Sufi?

Sufi dervishes were a special class of Muslim ascetics or

mystic who, by virtue of their amazing spiritual power and overwhelming piety and devotion, were directly selected by Allah to guide mankind on the right path of truth and righteousness. They have rendered invaluable services not only in building up but also in polishing and preserving the moral, spiritual, social, cultural, and even political behaviour and character of the people, fighting courageously the eternal battles of religion against uncontrolled and unbalanced "Materialism". In this noble struggle, it must be noted, the Sufis have never lost even a single battle but have always come out triumphantly over "evil" like all other great religious founder and spiritual masters of the world. Their contribution, therefore, to our present civilization, which is the precious legacy of man's age long experiments and hard earned experiences, is inestimable, and their noble lesson cannot, and should not be ignored by the present generation specially when the moral and religious values are deteriorating under the violent impact of scientific materialism and its new social ideologies and political theories.

Contribution of Sufism

These great Sufi saints 'divided' deep

into the "divine mysteries" of the spiritual world, and although their teachings and lessons were strictly based upon the tenets of Islam but, in essence, they invariably coincide with the fundamental principles and the noble teachings of other great religion of the world. Their motto of life was "**LOVE TOWARDS ALL, MALICE TOWARDS NONE**" a very scared pledge aiming at the destruction of ill will and sin among mankind. In short their preaching is based directly on the divine law and commandments showing the right path of happiness and salvation to mankind without any discrimination of caste or creed it is therefore, unquestionably a very noble and grand contribution to the progressive civilization of the world, the real value of which can hardly be imagined or valued by the present generation. At this distance date when mankind had entered a new phase of material life and is speedily drifting towards spiritual bankruptcy and mammon worship.

Contribution of Sufis in India

Sufism came in INDIA with

Sufi dervish from Middle East countries during 11th and 12th centuries A.D. It was by overpowering spell and charm of their magnetic personality, spiritual power and exemplary conduct that they won the heart of millions of people in HINDUSTAN and thus laid the foundation of ISLAM and UNITY OF DIVERSITY in the country. They preached love among all classes of people with the ultimate aim of rising a one- nation edifice in this country. The lives of these 'humble' and 'peaceful' dervish, who brought nothing with them except the 'name of god' and resolution of preaching "universal love and brotherhood" were exclusively dedicated to the cause of religious enlightenment of the suffering mankind whom they rescued from many age long tyrannies. As such, they were naturally loved and respected by all classes and ranks of people from a peasant to a prince. They made INDIA their home, lived here and gloriously passed away in the service of mankind.

Knowledge of Sufism

One of the indispensable condition of

Sufism is 'ILM' or knowledge. In the light of HOLY QURAN and HADITH that "a dervish can reach the pinnacle of his spiritual glory only by acquiring, first of all, the necessary 'ILM' and then acting upon its dictates rigidly it lays down two kinds of 'ILM' viz.

The divine knowledge or the vast reservoir of knowledge. The ultimate knowledge that is given to man which is a mere 'DROP' from the vast ocean of the all- knowing divine knowledge. In the other words, "the divine knowledge is the vast and unlimited ocean of that "secret knowledge" which is owned by Allah alone, while the 'limited' knowledge is only a tiny particle of it which is bestowed upon man to conduct his worldly life" Kinds of 'ILM'.

The knowledge of realizing and recognizing that there is an Omnipotent, Omnipresent and Omniscient GOD, who is, and shall ever, be.

The knowledge of recognizing the fact that GOD knows, sees and everything of his universe. The knowledge of appreciating GOD'S unlimited powers as the "ALL POWERFUL MAKER" of the universe. Again, "there are three branches of 'ILM' so far as Islamic Sharia (LAW) is concerned, viz.

The Book

The traditions of the of the **Holy Prophet**. The unity of the 'Millat' or community. These branches cover every phase of man's life from cradle to grave.

Characteristics of Sufi:

Discussing the characteristics of **Tasawwuf** and Sufis there are eight qualities of a Sufi:

- The courage and magnanimity of **Prophet Ibrahim**.
- The obedience of **Prophet Ismail**.
- The patience and forbearance of **Prophet Ayub**.
- The signs of **Prophet Zakaria**.
- The poverty of **Prophet Yahya**.
- The simplicity of dress of **Prophet Musa (Moses)**.
- The traveling nature of **Prophet Isa, Christ**.
- The "Fuor" (contentment and renunciation) of **Prophet Mohammed**.

Life of a Sufi

The life of a Sufi is the "life of a spirit" regulated strictly in

accordance with Islamic theology and traditions. To attain this his first lesson is his unshakable belief in the existence of Allah and unconditional surrender to his will. This entails a strenuous life attended by rigid austerity and self-denial. He has to undergo courses of training in prayers and meditation to attain the divine knowledge and realization of truth. This particular knowledge is passed on 'in secret' by one Sufi to another having the requisite qualification i.e. one who does not think evil does not see evil and does not speak evil. Without this divine knowledge one, cannot fathom the hidden mysteries of the nature and those of soul. To sum up the whole object of Sufism is to attain the highest spiritual perfection.

A Sufi will be distinguished from other on account of his detachment from his Parents.

Children, Wealth, Power, Position, and Comforts. His ignorance vanishes in the influence of the 'DIVINE LIGHT' of the most high, the lord of entire universe. In such an ecstatically devotion there is neither pain nor sorrow for him as he is overwhelmingly to the almighty GOD. Thus a Sufi saint is a spiritual king, far above all temporal kings, disguised in the patched robes of a humble dervish.

HAZRAT KHALWAJA GHARIB NAWAZ (R.A) was one of the greatest Sufi saint the world ever knows. His spiritual influence and benedictions have been, and are still a perpetually source of inspiration courage and guidance to the afflicted humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion.

Basics of Sufi

Tasawwuf or Sufism

Tasawwuf or Sufism (the translation usually preferred in the West) is the name of the ways Sufis follow to reach God, the Truth. While the term tasawwuf usually expresses the theoretical or philosophical aspect of the search for truth, its practical aspect is usually referred to as 'being a dervish'. Tasawwuf has been defined in many ways. According to some, tasawwuf is Almighty God's annihilating man with respect to his ego and self-centredness and then reviving him spiritually with the lights of His Essence; in other words, God's annihilating man with respect to his own will and then directing him by His Own Will.

Another approach to tasawwuf sees it as the continuous striving to be rid of all kinds of bad maxims and evil conduct and acquiring virtues. Junayd al-Baghdadi, a famous Sufi master, defines tasawwuf as a way by which to recollect 'self-annihilation in God' and 'permanence or subsistence with God'. Shibli's definition is summarized as being always together with God or in His ever-presence while aiming at nothing worldly or even other-worldly.

Abu Muhammad Jarir describes it as resisting the temptations of the carnal self and bad moral qualities and acquiring laudable moral qualities. There are some who describe tasawwuf as seeing behind the [outward] reality of things and events and interpreting whatever happens [in the world] in relation with God Almighty. Then, by regarding every act of the Almighty as a window to 'see' Him, living one's life in continuous effort to view or 'see' Him with a profound, spiritual 'seeing' indescribable in physical terms, and living in profound awareness of being continually overseen by Him.

All the accounts just given can be summed up as follows: Tasawwuf means that by being freed from the vices and weaknesses particular to human nature and acquiring angelic qualities and conduct pleasing to God, one lives one's life in accordance with the requirements of knowledge and love of God and in the spiritual delight that comes thereby.

Tasawwuf is based on observing the rules of Sharia down to good manners and penetrating their (inward) meaning. An initiate or traveller upon the path (salik) who can succeed in this never separates the outward observance of Sharia from its inward dimension and carries out all the requirements of both the outward and inward dimensions of religion. Through such observance, he travels toward the goal in utmost humility and submission.

Tasawwuf is a path leading to knowledge of God and is a way demanding solemnity [of bearing and purpose]. There is no room in it for negligent or frivolous manners. It requires that the initiate should, like a honeybee flying from the hive to flowers and from flowers to the hive, continuously strive in pursuit of knowledge of God. He should purify his heart from all attachments other than seeking God, and resist all inclinations and desires and appetites of his carnal self. He should also lead his life at a spiritual level with a readiness to receive Divine blessings and inspirations and in strict observance of the Prophetic example. Sincerely admitting attachment and adherence to God as the greatest merit and honour, he should renounce his own desires for the sake of the demands of God, the Truth.

After these [preliminary] definitions, we should discuss the aim, benefits and principles of tasawwuf: Tasawwuf requires strict observance of the religious obligations and austerity in life-style, the renunciation of animal appetites. Tasawwuf aims, by purifying man's heart and employing his senses and faculties in the way of God, to live a life at the spiritual level. Tasawwuf also enables man, through constant performance of the acts of worshipping God, to deepen his consciousness of being a servant of God. It enables him to renounce the world with respect to its transient dimension and the face of it that is turned to human desires and fancies, and awakens him to the other world and to the face of this world that is turned toward the Divine Beautiful Names.

The benefit of Tasawwuf is that man develops the angelic dimension of his existence and acquires a strong, heart-felt and experienced conviction of the truths and articles of faith that at first he had accepted only superficially. The principles of tasawwuf may be listed as follows: Reaching substantial, true belief in Divine Oneness and living in accordance with its demands. In addition to heeding the Divine Speech (the Qur'an), discerning the commands of the Divine Power and Will on the face of the universe (the laws of creation and life which are the subject matter of the sciences) and obeying them. Overflowing with Divine love and getting on well with all other beings in the consciousness (originating from Divine love) that the universe is a cradle of brotherhood.

Acting with a spirit of altruism and therefore giving preference or precedence to the well-being and happiness of others. Acting in accordance with the demands of the Divine Will-not with the demands of our own will-and trying to lead our lives at the 'peaks' of self-annihilation in God and subsistence with Him. Being open to love, spiritual yearning, delight and ecstasy. Acquiring the ability to discern or unveil what is in hearts or minds through the expressions of the face and the Divine mysteries and meanings on the face of events. Visiting such places and seeking the company of such people as will encourage avoidance of sin and striving in the way of God. Being content with lawful or licit pleasures, and being determined not to take even a single step toward the sphere of the

unlawful. Continuously struggling against worldly ambitions and the illusions that lead us to suppose this world to be eternal. Never forgetting that even in the way of serving religion and striving for the guidance of people to the way of the Truth, salvation is only possible through certainty or conviction (of the truth of religious principles of belief and conduct), sincerity or purity of intention and aiming only to please God. Acquiring knowledge and understanding of the religious and gnostic sciences, and following the guidance of a perfected, spiritual master may be added to these principles, which are of considerable significance in the way of the Naqshbandiya. It may be useful to discuss tasawwuf in the light of the following basic concepts which are the subject-matter of the books written on good morals and manners and asceticism, and regarded as the points where one finds the 'Muhammadan Truth' in one's heart. They can also be considered as the lights by which to know and follow the spiritual path leading to God.

Origin of Sufi

Origin of Tasawwuf

As the history of Islamic religious sciences

tells us, the religious commandments were not recorded in the earliest times of Islam. The practice and oral circulation of the commandments pertaining to belief, worship, and daily life enabled people to memorize them. This is why it was not difficult to compile them in books. What had been memorized and practiced was recorded and arranged on paper. In addition, since the religious commandments mentioned above comprise the vital issues in a Muslim's individual and collective life, scholars gave priority to them and compiled books on them. Jurisprudents collected and codified in the form of books the Islamic Law and its rules and principles pertaining to all fields of life. Traditionists established the Prophetic Traditions and way of life and preserved them in books; theologians dealt with the issues concerning Muslim belief, and the interpreters of the Qur'an dedicated themselves to studying the meaning of the Qur'an, including the issues which would later be called the Qur'anic sciences such as Naskh (Abrogation of a law), Inzal (God's sending down the whole of the Qur'an at one time), Tanzil (God's sending down the Qur'an in parts on different occasions), Qiraat (recitation of the Qur'an), and Ta'wil (Exegesis), etc.

Thanks to these universally appreciated efforts, the truths of Islam and all its principles were established in a way not to leave any doubt concerning their authenticity. While all this work was being done in the fields of religious sciences, essentially based on jurisprudence, Tradition (Hadith), theology and Qur'anic interpretation, the Sufi masters who concentrated mostly on the pure spiritual dimension of the Muhammadan Truth tried to draw attention to the essence of man's being, the real nature of existence and the inner dynamics of man and the cosmos, directing attention to the reality of things lying beneath and beyond their outer dimension. Adding to the commentaries on the Qur'an, the narrations of the Traditionists and the deductions of the jurisprudents, their

asceticism, spirituality and self-purification, in short, their practice and experience of religion, the Sufi masters developed their ways. Thus, the Islamic spiritual life based on the actions of the spirit such as asceticism, regular worship, abstention from all major and minor sins, sincerity and purity of intention, love and yearning and man's admission of his essential impotence and destitution, became the subject-matter of a new science called tasawwuf having its own method, principles, rules and terms.

Even if there emerged over time some differences among the orders that were later established, it can be said that the basic subject-matter of this science has always been the essence of the Muhammadan Truth. Unfortunately, it has sometimes occurred that, although they are the two aspects of the same truth, the commandments of Sharia and tasawwuf - which is in reality the spirit of Sharia, comprising austerity, self-control and criticism and continuous struggle to resist the temptations of Satan and the carnal, evil-commanding self, and fulfil religious obligations, and so on - have been presented as contradictory to each other. While adherence to the former has been regarded as exotericism (self-restriction to the outward dimension of religion), following the latter has been seen as pure esoterism. Although this discrimination partly arises from the assertions that the commandments of Sharia are represented by jurisprudents or muftis, and the other by the Sufis, it should be viewed as (the result of) a natural, human tendency, which is that everyone gives priority to the way more compatible with his temperament and for which he has aptitude. As jurisprudents, Traditionists and interpreters of the Qur'an produced significant books based on the Qur'an and the Sunna and following the methods dating back to the time of the Prophet and the Companions, so also the Sufis compiled books on austerity, spiritual struggle against carnal desires and temptations, states of the spirit and stations depending also on the same sources, with the addition of their own spiritual experiences, love, ardour and rapture. By doing so, they tried to attract the attention of those whom they regarded as restricted to practising the outward dimension of religion and reflecting only on it, to their way and the spiritual aspect of religious life. Both the Sufis and the scholars, criticized for being restricted to the outward aspect of religion, aimed to reach God by observing the Divine obligations and prohibitions. Nevertheless, some extremist attitudes occasionally observed on both sides caused some disagreements between them. Actually, there was no substantial disagreement, nor should it have been viewed as a disagreement, that the different aspects and elements of religion were dealt with and presented under different titles. It is by no means a disagreement that while jurisprudence concerns itself with the rules of worship and daily life, with how to regulate and discipline man's individual and social life, tasawwuf aims to enable man to live his life at a high level of spirituality through self-purification and spiritual training. In fact, tasawwuf and jurisprudence are like the two schools of a university which has undertaken to teach man the two faces or dimensions of Sharia and educate him to be able to practise it in his life.

These two schools cannot be one without the other. One teaches how to perform the prescribed prayers, how to realize the canonical purity required for worship, how to fast, how to give the obligatory alms, and how to regulate his daily life from shopping to marriage, etc. The other concentrates on the meaning of these and other acts of, how to make worshipping an inseparable dimension of man's existence and how to elevate man to the rank of a universal, perfect being, which is the true humanity. That is why neither of

these disciplines can be neglected. Although some impertinent ones among those claiming to be Sufis have gone so far as to label religious scholars as ‘scholars of ceremonies’ and ‘exoterists’, the real, perfected Sufis have always depended on the basic principles of Sharia and based their thoughts on the Book-Qur'an-and the Sunna, deriving their methods from these basic sources of Islam. The Wasaya ('Advices') and Ri'aya ('Observation of Rules') by al-Muhasibi, al-Ta'arruf li-Madhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf ('A Description of the Way of the People of Tasawwuf') by Kalabazi, al-Luma' ('The Gleams') by al-Tusi, Qut al-Qulub ('The Food of Hearts') by Abu Talib al-Makki and al-Risala ('The Treatise') by al-Qushayri are among the precious sources where tasawwuf is dealt with according to the Book and Sunna. Among these sources some concentrate on self-control, the purification of the self, while others elaborate various topics concerned with tasawwuf. After these great compilers mentioned came Hujjat al-Islam Imam al-Ghazali, the author of *Ihya' al-Ulum al-Din* ('Reviving the Religious Sciences'), his most celebrated work.

He reviewed all the terms, principles and rules of the way of tasawwuf and, establishing those agreed on by all the Sufi masters and criticizing others, united once more these two disciplines, namely the outer and inner dimensions of Islam or jurisprudence and tasawwuf. The Sufi masters coming after him presented tasawwuf as one of the religious sciences or a dimension thereof, promoting the unity or agreement between themselves and those once called the scholars of ceremonies. In addition, they were able to make some subjects of Sufism like the states of the spirit, certainty or conviction, sincerity and morality, which are dealt with by tasawwuf more profoundly, a part of the curriculum of madrasas-the institutions where religious sciences are taught. Although tasawwuf mostly concentrates on the inner world of man and deals with the religious commandments with respect to their meaning and effects on man's spirit and heart and is therefore abstract, it is not contradictory with any of the Islamic ways based on the Book and the Sunna. Far from being contradictory, it has its source, just like other religious sciences, in the Book and the Sunna and the conclusions the purified scholars of the early period of Islam drew from the Qur'an and the Sunna-ijtihad. It dwells on knowledge, knowledge of God, certainty, sincerity, perfect goodness and other similar, fundamental virtues. Defining tasawwuf with different titles such as the science of esoteric truths or of mysteries or the science of man's spiritual states and stations or the science of initiation, does not mean that it is completely different from other religious sciences.

Such definitions are the results of experiencing Sharia throughout centuries by men of different temperaments and dispositions. It is a distortion to present the viewpoints of the Sufis and the thoughts and conclusions of the scholars of Sharia as essentially different from each other. Although it is an undeniable fact that there have been some Sufis fanatically adherent to their own ways, as well as some religious scholars-jurisprudents, Traditionists, and interpreters of the Qur'an-restricted to the outward dimension of religion, those who follow and represent the middle, straight path have always formed the majority. Therefore, starting from some unbecoming thoughts cherished and words uttered by some jurisprudents and Sufis against each other, it is wrong to conclude that there is a serious disagreement between them. As compared with those always on the side of tolerance and consensus, the numbers of the others who have started or participated in conflict have been very few. This is what is natural, for like the jurisprudents who have depended on the Book and the Sunna in their ways,

the Sufis have also depended on these two main sources of Islam. In addition, the priorities of tasawwuf have never been different from those of jurisprudence. Both of these ways or disciplines have stressed the importance of belief, doing good deeds and good conduct. The only difference is that, more than the jurisprudents, the Sufis have also focused on purification of the self, deepening in the meaning of good deeds and multiplying them, and attainment of higher standards of good morals, by which man's conscience awakens to knowledge of God and man can enter a way leading to the required sincerity in practising the religion and obtaining God's good pleasure.

Since man can, by means of these virtues, acquire another nature-another heart-spiritual intellect-within the heart, a deeper knowledge of God, and another 'tongue' to mention God-he can perform all the commandments of Sharia in a deeper consciousness of, and with a disposition for, servant hood to God, and in greater exhilaration. It is by means of tasawwuf that man deepens in spirituality. Through the struggle with the selfhood, through solitude or retreat, invocation, self-control and self-criticism, the veils over the inner dimension of existence are torn apart and, as a result, man gains a strong conviction of the truth of all the major and minor principles of faith.

Sofi

Sofi is a term used to name the followers of tasawwuf (particularly by those speaking Persian and Turkish). According to some, it is Sufi. I think the difference arises from the different views of the origin of the word. Those who are of the opinion that it derives from 'sof' (wool) or 'safa' (spiritual delight, exhilaration) or 'safwat' (purity) or Sophos, a Greek word meaning wisdom, or that it implies devotion, prefer the word Sufi. Others who hold that it derives from 'suffa' (chamber) and stress that it should not be confused with 'sofu' (religious zealot), use the word Sufi. The term sofi has been defined in different ways, some of which are as follows: A sofi is a traveller to God who has been able to purify his self and acquired inner light or spiritual enlightenment. A sofi is a humble soldier of God whom the Almighty has chosen for Himself and freed from the influence of his carnal, evil-commanding self. A sofi is a traveller to the Muhammadan Truth who wears a coarse, woollen cloak not for show but as a sign of humility and nothingness and renounces the world as the source of vices and animal desires.

Sofis wear a coarse cloak made of wool and therefore are called 'Mutasawwif' in order to emphasize their states and their belief, conduct and life-styles. For it has been the characteristic of the Prophets and their followers and men of sincere devotion to wear a coarse, woollen cloak. A sofi is a traveller to the peak of true humanity who has been freed from carnal turbidity and all kinds of human dirt to realize his essential, heavenly nature and identity. A sofi is a man of spirit who deserves to be called a sofi because he tries to resemble the people of the Suffa-the poor, scholarly Companions of the Prophet who lived in the chamber adjacent to the Mosque of the Prophet-by dedicating his life to deserving that name. Some are of the opinion that the word sofi is derived from 'saf' (pure). However, although their praiseworthy efforts to please God and continuous services of God with their hearts set on Him are enough for them to be called pure ones, it is grammatically wrong that sofi is derived from saf. Some have argued that sofi is derived from Sophia or Sophos, a Greek word meaning wisdom. I think this is a fabrication of

foreign researchers who seek to find a foreign origin for tasawwuf. The first to be called a sofi in Islamic history is Abu Hashim al-Kufi, a great ascetic of his time. Abu Hashim died in 150 after hijra, which means that the word sofi was in use in the second century of hijra after the generation of the Companions and their blessed successors.

Sufism which we encountered for the first time in Islamic history with Abu Hashim al-Kufi appeared as a way of the people of spirituality following the footsteps of our Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, and his Companions in their life-styles. This is why Sufism has always been known and remembered as the spiritual dimension of the Islamic way of life. With respect to its original purpose, Sufism has sought to educate people to set their hearts on God and burn with love of Him. It has concentrated on good morals and mannerliness in conduct in the footsteps of the Prophets. It may well be claimed that some slight deviations have appeared in it over time, but these deviations should not be exploited as an excuse to condemn that way of spiritual purity. While describing the Sufis who lead a purely spiritual life, Imam Mushaira writes: The greatest title in Islam is Companionship of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings. This honour or blessing is so great that it cannot be acquired by anyone other than the Companions. The second rank in greatness belongs to Tabi'UN, the title of the fortunate ones who came after the Companions and saw them. This is followed by Taba-i Tabi'in, those came after the Tabi'UN and saw them. Just after the closing years of this third generation, and coinciding with the outbreak of some internal conflicts and deviations in belief, together with the Traditionists, jurisprudents and theologians who rendered great services to Islam each in their own field, the Sufis realized significant accomplishments in reviving the spiritual aspect of Islam. Especially the early Sufis were distinguished, saintly persons. They led an upright, honest, austere and simple life, free from all kinds of blemish, far from seeking bodily happiness and gratification of carnal desires, and followed the example of the Prophet, our Master, upon him be peace and blessings.

They were so balanced in their belief and thinking that it is not possible to regard them as followers of either ancient philosophers or Christian mystics or Hindu fakirs. For, first of all, tasawwuf was considered by its early followers and representatives as the science of the inner world of man, the reality of things and the mysteries of existence. A sofi was a student of this science, determined to reach the final rank of universal or perfect man. Tasawwuf is a long journey leading to the Infinite One and demands unending efforts. It is a marathon to be run without stopping with an unyielding resolution and without anticipating anything worldly. It has nothing to do with Western or Eastern types of mysticism or yogism or philosophies. And a sofi, who is the hero determined to run this marathon and reach the Infinite One, is neither a mystic nor a yogi nor a philosopher. It is, however, a fact that prior to Islam some Hindu and Greek philosophers followed a way leading to self-purification and struggled against their carnal desires and the attractions of the world. But the way they followed and tasawwuf are essentially different from each other. For, first of all, while the sofis seek to purify their selves through invocation, regular worship, utmost obedience to God, self-control, and humility, and continue to follow their way until death, the ancient philosophers did not observe any of these rules or acts. Their self-purification-if it really deserves to be considered as such-usually caused conceit and arrogance in many of them rather than humility and self-criticism. The sofis can be divided into two categories with respect to the path they follow: The first

category comprises those who give priority to knowledge and seek to reach their destination through knowledge of God (ma'rifa). The second category consists of those following the path of yearning, spiritual ecstasies and spiritual discoveries. The former spend their lives by continuously travelling toward God, progressing 'in' God and progressing from God on the wings of knowledge and knowledge of God, and try to realize the meaning of There is no power and strength save with God. Every change, alteration, transformation and formation they observe in existence and every event they witness or themselves experience, is like a comprehensible message from the Holy Power and Will experienced in different tongues. As for the second category, although they are serious in their journeying and asceticism, they may sometimes, since they are in pursuit of discovering hidden realities or truths, miracle-working, spiritual pleasure and ecstasies, suffer deviations from the main destination and fail to reach God Almighty.

Although it is grounded on the Qur'an and Sunna, this second path may yet lead some initiates to cherish certain desires and expectations such as having a spiritual rank, being able to work miracles, being known as a saint, etc. That is why the former path, which is the path leading to the greatest sainthood under the guidance of the Qur'an, is safer. The sofi divide people into three groups. The first group comprises those they call the perfect ones who have reached the destination. This group is divided into two sub-groups, namely the Prophets and the perfected ones who have reached the Truth by strictly following them. It is possible that some among those perfected ones are not guides; rather than guiding people to the Truth, they remain annihilated or drowned in the waves of the 'ocean of union and bewilderment.' Their relations with the visible, material world are completely severed and therefore they live unable to guide others. Those belonging to the second group are called initiates. They are also divided into two sub-groups. The first sub-group are those who completely renounce the world and, without considering the Hereafter, seek only God Almighty. The second group consists of the initiates who aim to enter Paradise and do not completely give up tasting some lawful pleasures of the world. They are called by different titles such as ascetics, worshipping ones, the poor or the helpless. As for the third group, since their aim is only to live an easy, comfortable life in the world, the sofi call them the settling or clinging ones - those who cling heavily to the earth. They are evil, unfortunate ones belonging, according to what the Qur'an calls them, to 'the group on the left', who are 'blind' and 'deaf' and do not understand. Some have also referred to the three groups mentioned as the Foremost or those brought near to God, the people on the right, and the people on the left.

Tawba (Repentance), Inaba (Sincere Penitence) and Awaba (Turning To God in Contribution)

Repentance (tawba) simply means that one feels regret

and is filled with remorse for wrongdoing and turns to God again with a new intention to make up what one has neglected. According to truth-seeking scholars, repentance signifies a sincere effort to be saved from opposing the Divine Essence in feelings, thoughts, intentions and acts and to sincerely comply with His commands and prohibitions. Repentance does not consist in feeling disgust at something bad or prohibited and giving up doing it. Repentance is remaining aloof from whatever God hates and prohibits, even if it seems agreeable to sense and reason. Repentance is usually used together with nasuh, literally meaning pure, sincere, reforming, improving and repairing. Tawba nasuh-sincere and reforming repentance - means a pure, sincere repentance that perfectly reforms and improves. It is that one feels sincere, heart-felt and true remorse for the wrongdoing one commits and sets a good example for others in this respect.

The Qur'an points to it where it mentions true repentance: O you who believe! Turn to God in true, sincere repentance. (66.8) There are three categories of repentance: (a) The first is the repentance of ordinary people who are unable to discern Divine truths. A man feels his disobedience to God as disquietude and, conscious of his sinfulness which clouds his heart, turns toward God and expresses his repentance with relevant words - such as: 'I have fallen or committed a sin, forgive me!' Or, 'I ask for God's forgiveness.' (b) Those half-awakened to Divine truths beyond veils of material existence feel an inward thrill of sinfulness and remorse just after anything occurring to their minds or hearts incompatible with the consciousness of always being in the omnipresence of God or after every instance of heedlessness enveloping their hearts - they then immediately take refuge with the Mercy and Favour of God. One with such degree of wakefulness and spiritual alertness is as described in the following Tradition: God's Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, declared: One who sincerely repents of his sin is as if he had never committed it. When God loves a servant of His, his sins do not harm him. Then he recited the verse: 'Assuredly, God loves the oft-repentant and those who always seek to purify themselves.' When asked about the sign of repentance, he declared: It is heart-felt remorse. (c) Those who live so careful a life that, as is declared in a Tradition, even while they themselves are sleeping, their hearts are awake, immediately discard whatever intervenes between God and their hearts and other innermost faculties and regain the consciousness of their relation to the Light of the Lights.

They always manifest the meaning of how excellent a servant! Truly he was ever turning in contrition (to his Lord). (38.44) Repentance means regaining one's essential purity after every spiritual deformation, and frequent self-renewal. [The stages of] repentance are: one feels sincere remorse and regret; one is frightened whenever one remembers the sins one has committed in the past; one tries to eradicate injustices and supports justice and right; one reviews one's responsibilities and performs or makes up obligations neglected in the past; one reforms oneself by removing spiritual defects caused by deviations and errors; one regrets and laments the times one has spent without mentioning or

remembering God and thanking Him and reflecting on His works, and is always apprehensive and alert that one's thoughts and feelings may be tainted by things that intervene between oneself and God. This last quality is particular especially to those greatly distinguished with nearness to God. If a man does not feel remorse, regret and disgust for the error he has committed, however great or small it is, and if he is not fearful and apprehensive that he may fall back into it at any time, and if he does not take shelter in servant hood to God and sincerity in servant hood in order to be freed from the deviations and errors into which he has lapsed as a result of falling away from God, his repentance will be no more than lying. Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi says about sincere repentance: I have repented and turned to God so sincerely that I will not break [the vow of penitence] until my soul leaves my body. In fact, who other than an ass steps toward perdition after having suffered so much trouble (on account of his sins)? Repentance is an oath of virtue, and holding steadfastly to it is heroism requiring a strong will-power. The lord of the penitents, upon him be peace and blessings, says that one who repents sincerely and holds steadfastly to it is of the rank of the martyrs, while the repentance of those who cannot be freed from their sins and deviations although they repeatedly repent of them means mocking the 'door' toward which the truly repentant ones turn in utmost sincerity and resolution. A man who does not refrain from sins although he claims that he fears Hell, and does not do righteous deeds although he claims that he looks forward to Paradise, and is indifferent to the way and practices of the Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, although he asserts that he loves the Prophet, cannot be serious and true in his claims. So also it is difficult to accept as sincere and pure-hearted one who spends his life between turns of sin and shows of repentance.

The first station of an initiate is repentance, while the second is inaba (sincere penitence). In everyday usage, inaba is also used to express the ceremony held when a man submits himself to a spiritual guide (as a murshid). While repentance requires training feelings, thoughts and acts to direct them from opposition to admission and obedience, sincere penitence demands critique of the authenticity, sincerity and sufficiency of that admission and obedience. Repentance is a progressing or journeying toward God - meaning efforts to do whatever is pleasing to God and refraining from whatever is forbidden by Him. Sincere penitence is an ascension through the stations of journeying in God - meaning efforts to live an upright life in self-annihilation and in absorption to seek God's good pleasure in whatever one does and thinks. Awba (turning to God in contrition), is an ascension through the stations of journeying from God-meaning being responsible for guiding others after having embodied the Islamic way of belief, thought and conduct. In other words, taking refuge with God in fear of dying an unbeliever and deserving eternal punishment is repentance; one's annihilating one's self in God with the desire of preserving one's spiritual rank is sincere penitence, and a man's closing himself to any other desires, ambitions or aims other than God's good pleasure is turning to God in utmost contrition. The first is the state of all believers and expressed in the verse: Repent you all to God, O believers! (24.31); the second is an attribute of saints and the foremost in belief and good conduct brought near unto God. Its beginning is to be seen in the verse, Turn to your Lord repentant (39.54) and its end is stated in, He comes with a contrite heart (50.33). The third is particular to Prophets and Messengers. God appreciates and praises them: How excellent a servant! Truly he was ever turning in contrition (to his Lord). (38.44) The words expressing repentance uttered by those who are always conscious of being in

the Omnipresence of God in fact express sincere penitence or turning to God in contrition. It is in this sense that the words of the best of creation, upon him be peace and blessings, should be understood when he said: I ask God's forgiveness seventy or a hundred times a day. Repentance is the act or manner of those who try to live an upright life but are unconscious of God's constant supervision of His servants and what nearness to God really means.

Those who live in awareness of nearness to God regard it as heedlessness to turn to God in the way ordinary people do so, for He directs them however He wishes and constantly supervises them and is nearer to them than anything else. Their station is not the station of the people of the Unity of Being, ecstatic saints who view the creation completely annihilated in God and therefore accept God as the only truly existent being. It is the station of the people of the Unity of the Witnessed, the scholarly saints who accept that the truly existent one is He Who is witnessed or discerned beyond the creation. More than of those, it is the station of those progressing in the shadow of the practice of the Prophet Ahmad (Muhammad), upon him be peace and blessings, or in the light of the lamp of Muhammad. It is merely an assertion and groundless claim when those who are not of this station and live on [merely] the outer surface of their existence talk of awba and inaba and especially of the final points of these two stations.

Muhasaba (Self Criticism and Self Interrogation)

Literally meaning reckoning, settling the accounts and self-interrogation, muhasaba (self-criticism) is that a believer always reviews whatever he says and does every day or even every hour, good or bad, right or wrong. He also thanks God for the good he has done and tries to erase his sins and deviations by asking God to forgive him and he amends his errors and sins by repentance and remorse. Muhasaba is the very important and serious attempt of a believer to assert himself in his loyalty to God. It is recorded by the writer of *Futuhat al-Makkiya* ('Makkan Conquests') - Muhy al-Din ibn al-'Arabi - that the righteous people of the early centuries of Islam used to either write down or commit to their memories whatever they did or said every day. Then they criticized themselves for any evil or sin in their words and deeds in order to protect themselves from the storms of vanity and whirls of self-pride, and they also asked for God's forgiveness for that evil sin.

They used to shelter in the quarantine of repentance against the viruses of errors and deviations, and prostrate in thankfulness to God for the meritorious deeds or words that the Almighty created through them. Self-criticism may also be described as seeking and discovering one's inwardness and spiritual depth and exerting the necessary spiritual and intellectual efforts to acquire true human values and develop the sentiments that encourage them. It is by means of such efforts that a man distinguishes between what is good and bad and what is beneficial or harmful to him throughout his life and maintains the uprightness of his heart. It is through continuous self-criticism that a man is enabled to evaluate the present and prepare for the future. Again, it is through self-criticism that he

can make up for past mistakes and be absolved in the sight of God, constantly realizing self-renewal in his inner world in order to achieve a steady relation with God. This is so because it depends on whether a man can live a spiritual life and is aware of what takes place in his inner world that he can preserve his celestial nature as a true human being and keep his inner senses and feelings active. With respect to both his spiritual life and his everyday practical life, a Muslim cannot be indifferent to self-criticism. On the one hand, he tries to revive his ruined past with the breezes of hope and mercy blown by Divine calls such as Repent to God (24.31) and Turn to Your Lord repentant (39.54) which come from the worlds beyond and echo in his conscience. On the other, through the warnings, at once as frightening as thunderbolts and as exhilarating as mercy, contained in the verses such as O you who believe! Fear God and observe your duty to Him. And let every soul consider what it has prepared for the morrow (59.18), he comes to his senses and becomes alert (against committing new sins), being defended as if behind locked doors against all kinds of evils. Taking each moment of his life to be a time of germination in spring, he seeks ever greater depth in spirit and heart with insight and consciousness arising from belief.

Even if he is sometimes pulled down by the carnal dimension of his existence and falters, he is always on the alert, as is stated in the Divine declaration: Those who fear God and observe His commandments, when a passing stroke from Satan troubles them, they immediately remember (God), and lo! They are all aware (7.201). Self-criticism is like a lamp in the heart of a believer and a warner and a well-wishing adviser in his conscience. Every believing man distinguishes through it between what is good and evil and what is beautiful and ugly and what is pleasing to God and what is displeasing to Him, and by the guidance of that well-wishing adviser, he surmounts all obstacles, however seemingly insurmountable, and reaches his destination. Self-criticism attracts Divine mercy and favour, enabling one to go deeper in belief and servant hood, to succeed in practicing Islam, and to gain nearness to God and eternal happiness. It also prevents a believer from falling into despair that will ultimately lead him to rely in vanity on his own acts of worship to be saved from Divine punishment in the Hereafter. [Note: If a man falls into despair (of Divine mercy) concerning his eternal life because of his sins, he tries to find a way to relief from Divine punishment. He then remembers his past good acts and relies on them. However, this is an utterly inadequate way, as it is purely through Divine mercy that a man can be saved from God's punishment and enter Paradise. Tr.] As self-criticism opens for man the door to spiritual peace and tranquillity, it also causes him to fear God and His punishment in awe of Him. In the hearts of those who constantly criticize themselves and call themselves to account for their deeds is always echoed the Prophetic warning: If you knew what I know, you would laugh little but weep a lot. Self-criticism which gives rise to both peacefulness and fear in a man's heart, continuously inspires in him the anxiety of those who live doubled up with the heavy responsibility they feel - the anxiety voiced as: If only I had been a tree cut into pieces. Self-criticism makes man always feel the distress and strain expressed in: The earth seemed constrained to them for all its vastness and their own souls strained to them (9.118). In every cell of their brains resounds: Whether you make known what is in your souls or hide it, God will bring you to account for it (2.284), and they groan in utterances like I wish my mother had not given birth to me! While it is difficult for everyone to achieve self-criticism of such a degree, it is also difficult for one

who does not do so [to be sure that he will be able] to live today better than yesterday and tomorrow better than today.

Those who are crushed between the wheels of time, those whose every day is not better than the preceding one, cannot perform well their duties pertaining to the afterlife. It shows the perfection of one's belief that one constantly criticizes and reprimands oneself. Every soul who has planned his life to reach the horizon of perfect, universal man is conscious of his life and spends every moment of his life struggling with himself. He demands a password or visa from whatever occurs to his heart and mind. He controls himself against the temptations of Satan or the excitement of his temper and is extremely careful about whatever he will say or do. He frequently criticizes himself even for those of his acts seemingly most sensible and acceptable. When it is evening every day, he calls himself to account for what he has done through the day and when it is morning, he begins his day with a resolution not to commit a sin. He knits the 'lace of his life' with the 'threads' of self-criticism and self-accusation. [Meaning, he spends every moment of his life in self-criticism and constant awareness of what he says and does.] So long as a man shows such a degree of loyalty and faithfulness to his Lord and spends his life in such a degree of humility, the doors of heaven are opened to him full-wide, and there comes to him the invitation: Come O faithful one, you have intimacy with Us. This is the station of intimacy, we have found you a faithful one. Every day he is honoured with a new, heavenly journey in spirit. It is God Himself Who swears by such a purified soul in the verse, Nay, I swear by the self-accusing soul! (75.2)

Tafakkur (Reflection)

Literally meaning thinking on a subject

deeply, systematically and in detail, tafakkur (reflection) is the lamp of the heart, the food of the spirit, the spirit of knowledge and the soul and light of the Islamic way of life. Without reflection, the heart is darkened, the spirit becomes exasperated and Islam is lived at a superficial level devoid of meaning and profundity. Reflection is such a light in the heart that good and evil, harm and benefit and beauty and ugliness can be discerned and distinguished from each other through it. Again, it is through reflection that the universe becomes a book to study and the verses of the Qur'an disclose their meaning and secrets more deeply. Reflection is a vital step to take a lesson from what is going on around us and draw conclusions from it. It is also a golden key to open the door of experiences, a seed-bed where the trees of truth are planted and the pupil of the eye of the heart is opened. It is because of this that the greatest of mankind who is the foremost in reflection as in all other virtues, upon him be peace and blessings, declares: There is no act of worship as meritorious as reflection. So, reflect on the bounties of God and the works of His Power. But do not attempt to reflect on His Essence, for you will never be able to do that. By this declaration, in addition to pointing out the merit of reflection, the glory of mankind, upon him be peace and blessings, determines the limits of reflection and reminds us of the limits of our capacity. In order to draw attention to the same point, the writer of al-Minhaj ('The Way Traced') writes: Reflection on bounties is a condition of following this way, while reflection on Divine Essence is a manifest sin. It is both false and useless to doubt and think about Him, and also means seeking to obtain something already obtained.

In fact, in its verse, they reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth (3.191), the Qur'an presents to our views the book of the universe with its way of creation, the peculiarities of its letters and words, the harmony and coherence of its sentences, and its firmness as a whole. By drawing our attention to the universe and calling us to think about it, the Qur'an shows us one of the most beneficial forms of using the power of reflection. To reflect on and study the revealed book of God, the holy Qur'an, and try to follow it in all our thoughts, conceptions and acts; to discover the Divine mysteries in the book of the universe and, through every new discovery which helps man to deepen and unfold in belief, to live a life full of spiritual pleasures along a way of light extending from belief to knowledge of God and therefrom to love of God; and then to progress to the Hereafter and God's good pleasure and approval: this is the way to become a perfect, universal man. One can use one's faculty of reflection in every field of science. However, rational and experimental sciences can only be a first step or a means to reach the final target of reflection, which is knowledge of God, provided the mind of man has not been deformed and led astray by wrong conceptions and premises. Studying existence as if a book and reflecting on it can give the desired results and provide ceaseless information and inspirations provided it is admitted that things with all their attributes are created by God. This is what is aimed at and should be done by those who attribute all things to God with utmost conviction and who have attained spiritual contentment through knowledge, love and remembrance of God. Reflection should be based on and start with belief in God as the Originator of all things. Otherwise, although it can finally reach God if it finds Him at any stage of its 'journeying,' it will not be able to go further than conviction of God's existence and Unity. Whereas reflection that is based on and starts with belief in God as the Creator and unique Administrator of all things, progresses and deepens without interruption with new discoveries and develops into further and further dimensions. That is, since such a reflective activity starts with God having the Names the First and the Outward and progresses toward Him as the Last and the Inward, it will progress uninterruptedly and not come to an end.

Encouraging people to such a reflection, focused upon a determined aim, entails encouraging them also to learn and use the methods of the sciences that study the ways of manifestation of existence. Since with all their elements and compounds, the heavens and earth are the property and kingdom of God, studying every incident, thing and quality in the book of existence also means studying the ways of the exalted Creator's disposal of existence. The way of the one who can study and comprehend this book of existence accurately, and design his life accordingly, will be the way of guidance and righteousness, and his final station will be Paradise where he will drink of kawthar-the blessed water of Paradise. Contrary to the people of loss and perdition who wander in the pits of heedlessness and ingratitude to God Who is the true Owner of all the infinite variety of beauties and bounties in the world, those following the way to Paradise equipped with reflection recognize the True Giver of all bounties and obey Him in consciousness of what believing in Him means. They travel from gratitude to being provided with all kinds of bounties and from bounties to gratitude, in the footsteps of angels, the Prophets and the truthful and loyal, and do everything incumbent upon them so as to be able to thank God for His blessings. On the 'vehicle' of reflection and with the help of remembrance of God, they surmount all obstacles appearing on their way and, progressing from taking necessary

measures (to attain their goal) to submission and from submission to committing all their affairs to the Power of God, they fly through the 'heavens' to their final destinations.

Firar and I'tisam (Fleeing and Taking Shelter)

Literally meaning running away from something, firar (fleeing) denotes in the language of Sufism journeying from the created to the Creator, sheltering from the 'shadow' in the 'original,' (in Sufism, the creation is viewed as a shadow of an original, truly existent One, Who is God, the Creator). It also means renouncing the 'drop' to plunge into the 'ocean,' (since everything in the world is no more than a drop taken from an ocean, in Sufism, material existence and pleasures are regarded as having the meaning and worth of a drop, while the Origin of existence, the Creator, corresponds to the ocean). Further it means discontent with the piece of glass (where the sun is reflected) turning to the 'sun,' (a piece of glass signifies Divine manifestations in the world, while the sun the origin of these manifestations, that is God Himself) and escaping the confinement of self-adoration to 'melt away' in the rays of the Truth. The verse Flee to God (51.50) which points to a man's journeying in heart and in spirit, may be referring to this action of the heart, the spiritual intellect. The more distant a man is from the suffocating atmosphere of corporeality and the carnal dimension of his existence, the nearer to God and the more respectful to himself he is.

Let us hear from the Prophet Moses, upon him be peace, who was a loyal slave at the door of the Truth, how one fleeing to and taking shelter in God is rewarded: Then I fled from you when I feared you, and my Lord has granted to me the power of judging (justly and distinguishing between truth and falsehood, and the right and wrong) and has made me one of His Messengers (26.21). The Prophet Moses draws attention to the fact that the way leading to spiritual pleasures and meeting with God and Divine vicegerency and nearness passes through fleeing. The fleeing of ordinary people is taking refuge with God's forgiveness and favour from the tumults of life and the ugliness of sins. They always repeat or consider the meaning of My Lord! Forgive and have compassion, for you are the Best of the Compassionate (23.118). They also seek God's shelter in utmost sincerity, saying: I take refuge with you from the evil of what I have done. The fleeing of the distinguished ones - distinguished by their piety and nearness to God - is fleeing from their own defective qualities to Divine Attributes, from feeling in the depths of the heart to discernment and observation, from the ceremonious performance of the duty of worship to its innermost dimension, and from carnal feelings to spiritual sensations. This is referred to in O God! I take refuge with Your approval from Your wrath and with Your forgiveness from Your chastisement. The fleeing of the most advanced in knowledge and love of God and in piety is fleeing from Attributes to Divine Being or Essence and from the Truth to the Truth Himself.

They say I take refuge with You from You, and are always in awe of God. The fleeing of all those groups results in taking shelter and seeking protection. As consciousness of fleeing is proportionate to the spiritual profundity of him who flees, so also the quality of the

destination reached varies according to the degree of the awareness of him who takes shelter. Those to be regarded as from the first group end in knowledge of God. They remember God through everything they see and mention Him. They cherish desires and imagine things impossible for them to realize and finally come to rest at sensing the reality of We haven't been able to know You as knowing You requires, O Known One. They always feel and repeat in ecstasy: Beings are in pursuit of knowledge of You, and those who attempt to describe You are unable to do so. Accept our repentance, for we are human beings unable to know You as knowing You requires. Those to be included in the second group sail every day for a new ocean of knowledge of God and spend their lives in ever-renewed radiations of Divine manifestations. However, they can in no way be saved from the obstacles intervening between them and the final station where their overflowing spirit will subside. With their eyes fixed on the steps of the stairway leading to higher and higher ranks, they fly upward from one rank to another and tremble with fear of descending. Those to be included in the third group who have been freed from the tides of the state (see: State) and drowned in amazement (see: Amazement) are so intoxicated with the 'wine coming from the source of everything' that even the Trumpet of Israfil cannot cause them to recover from that stupor.

Only one who has been able to reach this rank can describe the profundity of their thoughts and feelings. Jalal al-Din al-Rumi says: Those illusions are traps for saints, whereas in reality they are the reflections of those with radiant faces in the garden of God. (Mathnawi, vol.1, p. 3) What is meant by 'the garden of God' is the manifestation of Divine Unity-the manifestations of one or many or all of the Divine Names throughout the universe. 'Those with radiant faces' denote Divine Names and Attributes which are focused on a single thing or being. So, the meaning of the couplet is this: The traps in which saints are caught are the manifestations of Divine Names and Attributes. These manifestations consist in illusions in the view of those who are blind to Divine truths. In the words of Sari Abdullah Efendi, since the hearts of the Prophets and saints are mirrors where the Names and Attributes of God as Divine Being or Divinity are reflected, the Attributes of God as the Lord or Divine Lordship, which are the garden of their radiant faces, manifest themselves to them at every moment with new charms.

Halwat and Uzlat (Privacy and Seclusion)

Literally meaning solitude and living all alone, privacy and seclusion (halwat u 'uzlat) denote both an initiate's going into retreat to dedicate all his time to worshipping God under the guidance and supervision of a spiritual master, and his being purified from all kinds of false beliefs, dark thoughts and feelings, unbecoming conceptions and imaginations which cause the initiate to fall distant from the Truth. He closes the doors of his heart to everything other than God and converses with Him through the tongue of his inner faculties. Seclusion is one dimension of privacy, while austerity is another. The first step in privacy is completed in forty days and therefore is called undergoing a forty-day period of austerity. When the spiritual master takes the initiate into privacy, he takes him to his retiring room where he prays for him and leaves. The initiate lives an austere life in that room where he is utterly alone. He eats little, drinks little; in that room of seclusion

which is regarded as a door to get nearness to God, he decreases and disciplines his bodily needs and tries to forget his carnal desires. He dedicates all his time - day and night - to worshipping God, to meditation, reflection, prayer, and supplication, etc.

In its aspect of avoiding meeting people and austerities, privacy dates back to the early days of Sufism and even to the great Prophets. Numerous Prophets and saints, most particularly the glory of mankind, upon him be peace and blessings, have spent certain portions of their lives in seclusion. Nevertheless, their original system of privacy and seclusion has undergone undesirable changes over time. The seclusion of the Prophet Abraham, the forty-day periods of the Prophet Moses, the austerities of the Prophet Jesus and the privacies of the Prince of the Prophets have been practiced in different ways by different people and have therefore undergone certain alterations. However, this can be regarded as natural to some extent, for inasmuch as seclusion is related to the moods, temperaments and spiritual capacities of individuals, only perfect spiritual masters can know and decide how long and under what conditions an initiate must be kept in seclusion. In the early days of his initiation, Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi underwent many forty-day periods of austerity in seclusion. However, when he found a true, perfect master, he left seclusion and chose to be in the company of people (jalwat).

Many other people before and after him have preferred being together with people to avoiding meeting with them. Austerity, one of the two dimensions of privacy mentioned above, means keeping a tight rein on the gratification of carnal desires and urging the spirit, enamoured, thereof, to rise to human perfections. It is only through austerity that the carnal self can be restrained and forced to renounce evil impulses and passions and to submit itself to the commandments of God. Again it is through austerity that it can be made to adopt humility and be like 'earth', to be a 'flower-bed': Be like earth so that roses may grow in you for nothing other than earth can be a medium for the growth of roses. Through austerities, everyone can receive certain Divine graces. Some can adorn their knowledge with good morals and their religious acts with sincerity and purity of intention and thereby gain mannerliness in their relations with both God and people. Others find themselves tossed this way and that in their relations with their Lord and continuously search for ways to get nearer and nearer to Him.

There are still others who, like a dragonfly which has just come out of its cocoon, spend their lives among the spirit beings who may be regarded as butterflies of the celestial worlds they have just reached. What is essential to privacy is that the initiate must aim at nothing other than God's good pleasure and constantly wait in expectation of Divine favours to come. He must wait, not sitting idly but, with the eye of his heart open and in utmost care and excitement not to miss any of the Divine inspirations and gifts that may flow into his heart, and with the courtesy and decorum appropriate to being in the omnipresence of God. The following words of La Makani Husain Effendi express this meaning very aptly: Clean the fountain of your soul until it becomes perfectly pure. Fix your eyes on your heart until your heart becomes an eye. Give up doubts and put the pitcher of your heart against that fountain, and when that pitcher is filled with the water giving delight, withdraw yourself and submit to its Owner His home* When you leave it, God doubtless comes to His home. Never leave the devil-robber to enter the home of your heart, For once it has entered it, it is very difficult to throw it out. It is true that God is

absolutely free from the confinements of time and space, His relations with man occur on the 'slopes' of the heart. For this reason, the 'emerald hills' or 'slopes' of the heart must always be ready to receive the waves of His manifestations so that, in the words of Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzurum, the King may descend to His palace at night. God Almighty decreed to the Prophet David: Keep that home empty for Me so that I will be in it. Some have interpreted 'keeping the heart empty' as purifying the heart from considerations for others than God and from having relations with others without considering God's good pleasure. The following words of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi express this most appropriately: **One wise and sensible prefers the bottom of the well, for the soul finds delight in privacy (to be with God). The darkness of the well is preferable to the darkness people cause. One holding on to the legs of people has never been able to come with a head.** One must seclude oneself from others, not from the Beloved. Fur is worn in winter not in spring. Since the aim of seclusion is purifying the heart from love of others and always being with the Beloved, those who always feel the ever-presence of God while living among people, and who continuously discern the Divine Unity amidst multiplicity, are regarded as always being with God in seclusion. Contrary to this, the seclusion of others who, although they spend their lives in seclusion, have not been able to purify their hearts from attachment to whatever is other than God, is a deception. Those who always feel as if in the omnipresence of God do not need to seclude themselves from people. Such people, in the words of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi, **while keeping one of their feet fast in the sphere of Divine commandments, turn the other, like one of the arms of a pair of compasses, throughout the world.** They experience ascension and descent at every moment. This is the seclusion recognized and preferred by the Prophets and saints. God Almighty once said to Prophet David: O David! What is the matter with you that you seclude yourself from people and choose keeping alone? David, upon him be peace, answered: Lord! I renounce the company of people for Your sake. The Almighty warned him: Always keep vigil but do not keep aloof from your brethren. However, seclude yourself from those whose company is of no benefit to you. *'Home' signifies the heart and its Owner is God. **That is, one who relies on people to attain his goal, will not be able to do so.

Dhikr (Remembrance of Allah)

Dhikr (remembrance of Allah) is the greatest thing in our life and a well tried excellent method for purification of our heart. It eradicates all diseases from heart, produces in it the love of Allah and creates the consciousness of His Greatness; it brings us divine peace and satisfaction. **Allah** the Almighty Himself asked us to remember Him as much as possible. Says the Holy Quran: "**O ye who believe remember Allah very often and glorify Him morning and evening.**" (33:41-2)

Another verse says Quran says: **And when Salaat is finished then ye may disperse through the land and seek of the Bounty of Allah and celebrate the Praises of Allah much and often; they ye may prosper (here as well as in the next world.)** (62-10) in another verse the Holy Quran says the Dhikr imparts tranquillity and peace to the mind and the soul.

" Behold in the Remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (13-28).

In a verse, men of Faith have specifically been warned not to forget Dhikr by getting absorbed in the wealth and the family " O ye who believe let not your riches or your children divert you from the Remembrance of Allah if any act thus, the loss is their own." (63:9) Allah the Almighty shows His kindness to those who remember Him. He said: " Then do ye remember Me I will remember you." (2-152) The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) says: " Allah says when anyone remembers Me and his lips move in Dhikr I am by his side." In a verse of the Holy Quran mentioning the qualities of pious servants and their reward, Allah says: "**Men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from Remembrance of Allah nor from regular Salaat, nor from regular practice of Zakaat.** (24-37) to quote a few Hadith about Dhikr, the Holy Prophet (SallAllahu Alaihi Wasallam) says: " **There is a polish for everything, for the hearts it is Dhikr of Allah.**"

He has also said:

" **Those who remember Allah and those who do not are like those who are alive and those who are dead.**" (i.e. who remember Allah and celebrate, His praises are alive and those who do not are dead.) The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wasallam) was once asked who would be the most exalted among the servants of Allah on the Last Day, He (Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wasallam) replied " **Those who remember Allah, be they men or women.**" The Holy Prophet (Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam) once advised one of his companions. " **Keep your tongue always employed in repeating the name of Allah.**" Negligence towards Dhikr causes more and more retrogression. Those who close their hearts and tongues to Allah are deprived of all divine virtues, their hearts get hardened and they - become close associates of the devils.

Look what the Holy Quran says: "**He who turns away from the remembrance of His Lord He will cause him to undergo a severe Penalty.**" (72-17)

In another verse it has been said:

" **If anyone withdraws himself from the Remembrance of Allah Who is Most Gracious, He will appoint for him an evil one to be intimate companion to him**" (43-36)

In another verse it has been said:

" **Woe to those whose hearts are hardened against remembering of Allah, they are manifestly wandering.**" (39-22)

May Allah save us all from wandering the highest and the required degree of Dhikr is to acquire such a solemn state of mind and heart in which we remain continuously full of remembrance of Allah and be never without His thought. The state of permanent and all-pervading God's consciousness is achieved only through continuously engaging the tongue and heart in Dhikr and devout servant of Allah no doubt, achieve this state. The daily five Salaats are no doubt the remembrance of Allah but Dhikr has got a wider sense. It includes all sorts of the praises, be they with tongue or heart i.e. Salaats, the recitation of Holy Quran, the other prayers, the repetition His sacred names and devoted contemplation on the signs of Allah and the like come under Dhikr.

We are surrounded by evil forces that are trying to deviate us from the right path. To save ourselves from their grips we must remember **Allah** in every possible way. The more we remember Him the more benefited we are. The real Dhikr is that in whatever profession, state or circumstances a Muslim may be, he should do his best to observe the commands of **Allah** that are intended for such a situation

" O ye who believe ! Let not your wealth and your children distract you from remembrance of Allah." (63:9)

Thus whoever observes the commandments of Allah applicable to any given time under all circumstances and observe his responsibilities toward his family and in other worldly affairs like buying and selling, carries out the Dhikr of Allah even while engages in them.

The Methods of Dhikr, Remembrance of Allah. There are a number of hadiths which are directly relevant to the methods of dhikr used by various Sufi turuq. I have grouped them below, under the titles "**Posture is Irrelevant to Dhikr,**" "**Dhikr in Assembly and in a Circle,**" "**"Dhikr Saying 'La ilaha illa Allah,'"** "**"Dhikr by saying 'Allah,'"** and "**"No Limits to doing Dhikr."**" Posture is Irrelevant to Dhikr

The Qur'an says in meaning:

Lo! In the creation of the Heavens and the earth and in the night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding, such as remember Allah, in standing, sitting, and reclining. [Qur'an 3:190-191] What this part of the Qur'an establishes is that posture is not important in performing dhikr - standing, sitting, or reclining. Presumably other postures are also okay, so criticisms about posture during dhikr is irrelevant. **Ibn `Umar reported, "The Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam, peace be upon him, said, 'when you pass by a garden of paradise, avail yourselves of it.'** The Companions asked, 'What are the gardens of Paradise, O Messenger of Allah?' **The Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam, peace be upon him, replied, 'The assemblies of dhikr. There are some angels of Allah who go about looking for such assemblies of dhikr, and when they find them they surround them.'**" [Quoted from Fiqh us-Sunnah compiled by As-Sayyid Sabiq, vol. 4, Ch. 6]

There is also this important hadith about dhikr in general, and dhikr in an assembly: On the authority of **Abu Hurairah** (may Allah be pleased with him), who said that the **Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam** (May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: **Allah the Almighty says: I am as My servant thinks I am. I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself; and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. And if he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arm's length; and if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.**

[It was related by al-Bukhari, and also by Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah. From "**Forty Hadith Qudsi**," selected and translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Dar Al-Koran Al-Kareem, Lebanon, 1980), hadith no. 15.] Doing Dhikr by saying "**La ilaha illa Allah**" One of the ways of doing dhikr is by saying "**La ilaha illa Allah.**" Here are some hadiths which mention this....

Hazrat Jabir relates that he heard the **Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallam** having said:
"The best remembrance of Allah is 'La ilaha illa Allah.'" [From Tirmidhi, also related in the

Riyadh us-Saliheen of Imam Nawawi] Another hadith about saying 'La ilaha illa Allah' for dhikr is this.... Abu Hurairah reported that the Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Renew your faith." "How can we renew our faith?" they asked. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said, "Say always, 'La ilaha illa Allah'." [From Ahmad, with a sound isnad. Quoted in Fiqh us-Sunnah compiled by as-Sayyid Sabiq, vol. 4, ch. 6.] Doing Dhikr by saying "Allah" Regarding using the names of Allah in dhikr, the hadith I am aware of at present regarding this topic is the following.... The Prophet said, "The Hour will not arise before 'Allah, Allah' is no longer said on earth."

[Sahih Muslim] No Limits to doing Dhikr Now, some criticize those on the Sufi path for doing too much dhikr. However, Ibn Abbas (R.A.) is related as having said there is no limit to dhikr. The following quote I took from the book "Fiqh us-Sunnah" by as-Sayyid Sabiq. The saying of Ibn Abbas goes.... Ali b. Abi Talha relates that Ibn Abbas said, "All obligations imposed upon man by Allah are clearly marked and one is exempted from them in the presence of a genuine cause. The only exception is the obligating of dhikr. Allah has set no specific limits for it, and under no circumstances is one allowed to be negligent of it. We are commanded to 'remember Allah standing, sitting, and reclining on your sides,' [Qur'an 3:191] in the morning, during the day, at sea or on land, on journey or at home, in poverty and in prosperity, in sickness or in health, openly and secretly, and, in fact, at all times throughout one's life and in all circumstances." Dhikr is a very blessed practice, praised in the Qur'an and hadiths. May Allah help bring us satisfaction in our hearts through remembrance of Him. Say: "Truly Allah leaves to stray whom He will, but He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence -- Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah, for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction.

[Qur'an 13:27-28] Dhikr is a form of worship that comes after the ritual Prayer (Salah) and reading Qur'an in importance. While Salah has to be performed at certain times and under certain conditions of purity, dhikr can be made any time, any place. It can be done by repeating certain formulas to extol and praise Allah, or it can be just thoughts of Allah in one's heart. Islam does not require anyone to torture himself in order to reach a high stage of spirituality. Nor does he have to shun everything of this world. Rather, one can be close to Allah (God) by frequently remembering Him with his lips and heart, even as he is busy with his daily tasks. Dhikr can also take a more distinct form such as tasbeeh, which is extolling Allah. This is usually done by counting on the fingers or on prayer beads (called sibhah) and repeating phrases such as:

"Subhan Allah" (Allah is Sublime), "Al- Hamdulillah" (all praise to Allah) and "Allahu Akbar" (Allah is Greatest) thirtythree times each. Then the Muslim says, "Laa ilaha illa Allah. Wahdhu. La Shirika lahu. Lahu al-mulk, WA lahu al-hamd, WA hua 'ala kulli shay'in qadeer." (There is no god but Allah. He is one. He has no partner. To Him is the dominion and all praise, and He has power over all things.)